

TUTHILL (F.)

TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY

OF THE
STATE OF NEW-YORK.

Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages,

By FRANKLIN TUTHILL, M. D.,
Of New-York City.

Read at the Semi-Annual Meeting of the Society, June, 1852.

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C. VAN BENTHUYSEN, PRINTER TO THE LEGISLATURE,
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TRANSACTIONS.

1. REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS, DEATHS AND MARRIAGES. *By* FRANKLIN TUTHILL, M. D., *of New-York city. (Read at* *the semi-annual meeting of the Society, June, 1853.)*

The frequent unsuccessful efforts in the Legislature of New-York to repeal the "*Act providing for the registry of births, deaths and marriages,*" is our sufficient motive for reviewing the objections to, and briefly rehearsing the uses of, a systematic and permanent record of our vital statistics.

As a people, we are not wont to attach any great importance to the opinions of even our shrewdest ancestry, nor to think much more highly of a custom because it was baptised by age, and confirmed by a century. English travellers have never taunted us with a ridiculous veneration for antiquity, nor sneered at our punctilious obedience to the "law of precedents." Yet it relieves us from all suspicion of a morbid fondness for innovation, and removes all imputations of crudeness, to find that the practice we commenced has found favor with the wise of many generations, and done a worthy work in the past.

The history of birth records and bills of mortality, very fairly indicates the wisdom of the governments that have kept them. They never have been extensively employed where sound principles of political economy were not recognised, nor entirely neglected where this science has been cultivated. This remark we believe to be essentially true of all people, "from the rude savage to the polished Greek," and of all times since the Christian era. But if any people or time furnishes an exception, it is our own, so peculiarly practical, so eager for instant results from all their efforts, and impatient of all sowings that do not yield immediate harvests.

The ancient Jews seem to have kept religiously their public registers, from the remotest times until the destruction of their nation by the Romans. From them were constructed the genealogical tables of their sacred writings, reaching from Adam to the captivity of Judah. Through them, Josephus was able to trace his own descent from the tribe of Levi, and he assures us that his cotemporaries were careful, from the authentic documents preserved at Jerusalem, to prepare and frequently renew their own family records. Divided into tribes as they were, with a specified portion of the land of Canaan, for the inalienable possession of each, their titles to property depended very much on the accuracy of these registers. But a still higher reason actuated the Jew. The sure voice of prophecy had announced the race, the tribe, the family of the expected Messiah. The registry system afforded an infallible test of the merits of the claimant, and the fact that whatever Jew shall hereafter pretend to the Messiahship must fail to establish his pedigree through the unregistered years since the dispersion, is an irresistible argument that *Shiloh has already come*.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Marcus Aurelius ordered that parents should report the name and birth of each child before it had passed the thirtieth day of its existence; and the learned Ulpianus required records of all who arrived at any of the great eras of life during the year.

Similar records were kept at Athens, and the Athenians regarded them as the only safe basis for calculating their future strength; and before any enterprise was undertaken which might last through a series of years, they were consulted as the census of the future.

Among moderns, England has taken the lead in full and minute registration. Thomas Cromwell, while vicar-general of King Henry VIII. (A.D. 1538), ordered that "the clergy and every parson, vicar or curate should, for every church, keep one book of register, wherein they should write the day and year of every wedding, christening and burying within their parish, and therein set every person's name that shall be so wedded, christened or buried." This same Henry supported the assiduous and

zealous scholar Leland, as his statistical antiquarian and professor. But with Leland the office died also, and we have reason to suspect that the parish registration was either soon discontinued, or, if continued, so loosely and with so many interruptions as to render it of little service.

The earliest weekly and continuous bills of mortality extant in the Parish Clerk's Hall in Graunt's day, dated A. D. 1603, and he tells us by what process the information was collected. The death of a person was announced by the tolling of a bell, or by bespeaking of the sexton, a grave.

The sexton communicated the fact to the "searchers, two ancient matrons," who immediately proceeded to examine the corpse and collect such information as they could as to the cause of the death, and reported to the parish clerk.

The clerk made out his bills weekly, and weekly they were published to the world. Of small service were they, however, except to the curious, and to those whose business was immediately affected by the daily health of the city.

Graunt published his observations A. D. 1661. He trod in a new path. His persevering inquisition of the bills of mortality, which had lain unquestioned for so many years, tortured out secrets which posterity have kept in their most public places. He discovered some new diseases, and added many new facts to the domain of medical science. But his most important suggestions were intended to relieve the State of some of her heavy burthens; to devise a surer method of equalizing taxation; to show the wicked inutility of polygamy; to expose the folly of tolerating beggary, and to abate certain metropolitan nuisances. He laid the foundations of the science of political arithmetic, a most important department of political economy, and whose objects embrace all the circumstances that constitute a nation's strength.

Gregory, King, Petty and Davenant, followed in his track. Petty first applied the newly developed science to increasing the revenue and directing trade; but, beside that, his data were in-

complete; he had a king to please, and a court to flatter, conditions not the most favorable to the freedom of philosophical inquiry, and a little apt to warp a conclusion. King and Davenant applied them to the expunging of the national debt, replenishing the treasury, and filling the army.

Halley soon after applied these tables to a new use by unfolding a general formula for calculating the probabilities of human life and determining the value of annuities. DeMoivre made the principle still more familiar to the world by his *Doctrine of chances*, and his treatise on annuities.

Meanwhile statesmen and jurists all over Europe were awakening to the uses of registration and many registers were instituted; some by private enterprise and some by legislative authority. The transactions of scientific bodies and the political press began to abound in speculations on the increase of population, theories for extinguishing national debts, financial projects and schemes for life insurance. Magnificents contrivance for making fortunes in a day, and insuring them to survivors in case of death, were concocted and were already in operation, when Dr. Price demonstrated the fallacy of their arguments and pointed out the errors in their data which vitiated all their conclusions. The prodigious traffic in annuities, and the universal rage for risks dependent on the continuance of life were marvelously checked by his simple expositions. The Swedish bills from which he deduced his tables, and to whose correctness he pays a high compliment, had the honor of saving England from financial distress, and thousands of her families from impending ruin.

The political writings of the preceding century had assumed a statistical form, the Italians taking the lead, though the Germans were first to separate statistics from geography, of which they had always been deemed an unimportant branch. But the accumulated materials were yet in chaotic confusion. The thousands examples were wrought out, but the theorem was not yet formed. The custom-rolls, the excise and hearth-money lists, the bills of mortality, the parish registries and the various other means of minute information were periodically increasing, but there lacked some one to sift the valuable from the useless, until in the year

that Price's first edition was issued, Prof. Achenwall of Göttingen, who has been called the father of statistics, developed from them a shapely science. He first taught in the University of Göttingen, and by his zeal and influence gave a new impulse to every department of statistical learning. And now, these dry and forbidding details began to be turned to account for purposes of peace, as they had long been, to supply the sinews of war. And there were found men who were willing to devote their time and their fortune to the collection of those statistics that bear particularly upon the health and happiness of individuals and communities. Such an one was Sir John Sinclair. He sent out circulars to the clergymen of the church of Scotland, requesting their individual assistance, and the response was so prompt and hearty that there resulted a much more thorough and reliable investigation than was supposed possible. A letter of encouragement from General Washington, shows how his undertaking was regarded by that embodiment of virtue and wisdom, and it is pertinent to our purpose. He says, "I cannot but express myself highly pleased with the undertaking in which you are engaged (that of drawing up the statistical account of Scotland), and give my best wishes for its success. I am fully persuaded, that when enlightened men will take the trouble to examine so minutely into the state of society, as your enquiries seem to go, it must result in greatly ameliorating the condition of the people, promoting the interest of civil society and the happiness of mankind at large."

It is not strange that in a country so young and busy as ours, matters of the sort we speak of, should be very generally disregarded. Until lately, there have been few among us, with the leisure and the taste to attend to these problems in politics, whose solution depends upon a careful study of vital statistics. The first years of a nation's existence are shaped, not so much by the operation of the laws that regulate the growth and interests of old countries, as by sudden emergencies, and the gift of great men born of the occasion. Ours has been a pioneer population, subject to the instabilities, and extra hazards of a life in a wilderness, thickly populated with foes human and brute, visible and invisible, tangible and imponderable. General laws of life have been modified by such numberless exceptions; it is not strange

that an opinion was early rife of their inapplicability to us, and the consequent uselessness of an acquaintance with the facts from which they are deduced. But there have never been wanting, men who believed with Washington, that the most minute examinations of the state of society were desirable, and would soon be absolutely essential to our best good. On taking the census of 1810, under the direction of Mr. Gallatin, and the immediate supervision of Tench Coxe, an effort was made to secure such returns as would indicate the condition and disposition of industry and capital. The returns were very imperfect of course, but they sufficed to beget a demand for this species of knowledge, which has grown with our growth, and fed upon the facts furnished by these general and State enumerations. The marked feature of a later census was the fulness of its agricultural statistics; and those who are acquainted with the progress of opinions with reference to this most important branch of industry, well remember that the impulse given by this extensive advertisement, was a new era in the history of American agriculture. A collection of medical statistics was the superadded feature of the last census. It excites no surprise, that before and since its completion, these items have been stigmatised as trivial, impertinent, and untrustworthy. Yet they will be found, we think, no less useful to the world, than honorable to the head that planned and the government that carried out the project. We are far from conceding that our vital statistics can best be obtained through the medium of a decennial census. The idea of farming out to sub-marshals, whose ability to distinguish diseases cannot be justly presumed; and whose best authority is the word of a chance informant, who has nothing to gain by a troublesome accuracy, or to lose by careless, or even truthless statements, the duty of collecting facts which have no value at all, unless their scrupulous exactness is vouched, does not commend itself as the best conceivable mode. Some statements published on such authority will be utterly useless; but they will not mislead, for their error is obvious. Thus, no physician will conclude that the climate of Maryland is peculiarly favorable to the formation of pulmonary tubercles, on seeing in the census, that 857 persons died there during the year, from *consumption*, if he remembers that the causes of death were not fur-

nished by the attending physician, but by friends of the deceased, who very generally pronounce all lingering diseases, consumption; and hold their fatal issue to be the proof of a correct diagnosis. And yet the less delicate and general facts which modify the prospects of longevity, and render salubrious or unhealthy, different localities, are given, doubtless, with as much accuracy as are those which govern the levying of taxes, and the distribution of other public burdens. And we cannot but congratulate the profession and the public, whose highest good is synonymous with ours, on the prevalence of the liberal policy which has brought together from over this whole country, such a body of statistics of permanent value to the medical world.

But the objections to their accuracy make more evident the necessity of adopting some system which shall be less liable to errors. The national medical convention, at one of its earliest sessions, called attention to this subject, and memorialized the different State Legislatures for the passage of acts which seemed adapted to secure the object sought. In several States such laws were passed, and are yet in operation, and though the results are very unsatisfactory and imperfect, even now they give strong assurances of "doing yeoman service" at no distant day, in promoting knowledge among men. In our own State, such a law was enacted in the year A. D. 1847, and it promised to work well, but as it cost several thousand dollars of the States' precious funds, and created no new offices, our virtuous economists, long before it had enjoyed an opportunity to prove itself, began clamoring for its repeal; and, although not yet crowned with success, by persuading the people that they soon must be, they have made very nearly a dead letter of it.

Some object to *this specific law*. Sharing with them, as we do, a suspicion of its imperfectness, we would bespeak their assistance in improving it.

Others object that all laws of this sort are impracticable: that they never can be popular, for our institutions frown on the espionage and inquisition necessary to execute them: that we have no organization existing through which such operations can

be conducted cheaply, and would never consent to afford a bureau for the purpose.

Others deem this whole class of facts a costly luxury, which economical States cannot afford to enjoy, though very pleasant for philosophers, and worthy enough the munificence of wealthy princes.

Others aver that the most perfect system, in the most successful operation, would afford no substantial service to the world, and add nothing practically useful to the amount of men's knowledge! Incredible as it may seem, such objectors are to be found. Let us then, in all candor, consider some of its advantages.

They are not few or trifling, when the register is kept in its barest form, simply enumerating the births, marriages and deaths of a district within a given time. But to get its widest benefits, there should be added the circumstances attending these eras in the history of mankind, as the parentage of the born, the condition and ages of the marrying, the causes of death and the ages of the dying. Such a register furnishes tools for skillful workmen in many branches of intellectual industry—for the jurist and the geographer, the practical economist, the statesman, the actuary, the historian, and the physiologist. Its use for the first year or two will be limited. It may be kept a dozen years before its deductions can command perfect confidence. But its value is increasing with every day. It costs little, and after the lapse of a brief season, it returns that little in a thousand ways, with usury upon them all. Few trees bear fruit the year they are planted. Acorns dropped into the richest soil do not furnish oaks for ship timber in a season. The most perfect system of registration will wave much grateful and graceful foliage to the winds of many years, before the mellow fruit will load its branches. But then, a single bearing year repays all its cost, and its hardened, close-grained wood returns compound interest for all the days of its unproductiveness. These statistics, after curious men have had their observations on them, and learned their more superficial lessons will be filed away and forgotten by the great bulk of the people, but pored over by still, cloistered men, till the hieroglyphics surrender their significance. Some

quiet man in his laboratory will pour upon them the strong acids, one after another, of his cogent reasoning, till all the irrelevant and impertinent are dissolved out, and the precious metal remains alone in its purity. Some meditative student will place them in the cupel of his absorbing meditations, heat them in the glowing fervor of his complete abstraction, urge over them a strong blast from his discriminating judgment, until all the alloy is removed, and the silver flashes out its perfect purity. From out these leaden forms of statistics it is not the light rod of genius but the Lydian stone of patient study that receives the mark of truth. We may confidently expect them to reveal no less profitable secrets than those which we know are latent in our abundant meteorological tables, geological maps, and astronomical observations.

We, of America, think very highly of our registries of deeds. All our acres are numbered and as far as possible described and bounded, and at every change of ownership it is deemed wise to record it, and the descent of an old homestead is often more distinctly traced than the geneology of our acting aristocracy. Why should we not preserve with equally scrupulous fidelity our country's title to her contented, happy and healthy people, as to her timbered wilderness or her plough-vexed glebe? unless, indeed, a nation's strength and greatness consists not so much in men as in borders that outreach zones, and hem in an empire in hoarded wealth and generally diffused competence, in a fruitful soil and regions that teem with the objects of trade and commerce, in ships of the line, impregnable forts and frowning battlements.

Hallam has said, that statistics are to the political economist, what general history is to the philosopher; they are the foundations upon which he must base his reasoning, as to the comparative strength of states. Justice's scales are falsely balanced unless they are thrown in the fate of nations; the fortunes of empires are staked on their truth. War hazarded without their favorable response is as likely to annihilate the right, as to avenge the wickedest insult. Inglorious peace must needs be borne, when their oracles are dumb, or utter inauspicious auguries. "By this computing faculty," says Davenant, "Fabius Maximus found the way to break the strength of Hannibal." They are the pulse whose condition indicates almost unerringly the strength

of a country. When David would feel it, he was adjudged guilty of a treason as if in adopting the wisest human policy he distrusted the power of the theocracy. And if the bare numbers of the people are so desirable, how worthy are these vital statistics—*vital* truly in a double sense—to be called the people's pulse, announcing by their slightest variations, the symptoms of growth or decay in the body politic. Trusty records of our vital statistics are as much superior to the simple census of the fighting men, of the women and children, as a chart of every acre of the state, with its boundaries noted, and its description complete, and the whole so disposed as to facilitate reference, would be superior to a naked statement of the number of acres in each State. It is by studying bills of mortality, and birth and marriage records, in their connections, that we may learn what trades and professions, a people jealous of human life, health and happiness, should foster, and what avoid, as sapping the strength of the nation, and wasting its energies—solve the problems so puzzling to modern reforming philosophers whether heaven-ordained marriage or Gallic communism is better adapted to people the world and maintain its condition—settle the queries over which the Malthusians and their opponents so studiously brood—best dispose of the crowds of immigrants that like the waters of a rising tide, roll into every harbor, up every creek, submerge the shoals, fill the channels, cover the flats, and threaten the stout headlands, a living tide eager to work in its place, but ignorant where that place may be—prevent the sudden access of wide-spread commercial distress—break the neck of starvation, and cripple famine, before he sets his heavy heel upon our shore—devise ways and means for our most profitable present employment, to meet and relieve the growing wants of our great land, and to take up the sure word of prophecy for our future. Vital statistics are Baconian facts; and in the republic of facts, so soon as the number relating to any one topic becomes respectable, they move out from under the government of analogous facts, evolve their own rules, develop the law they live under, and are admitted to the state of a science. But some one objects, that this is an active busy age. Your figures may have many secrets buried under them, but we have not time to dig them out. We have fallen on prac-

tical times,—we have not the leisure or the patience, to fumble over folios of figures, or to reverence greatly your ciphering men in closets. Well, the age is a noisy one. The hands are hurrying up and down the rigging, leaping from spar to spar, and there is a prodigious excitement. But calm, cool heads take the observations, make the calculations, issue the orders, and guide our destinies. It is too busy a time, think they, who work the vessel, to be looking at stars through the sights of quadrants, studying old charts, and figuring in the cabin. But without the cool calculating of the navigator, hidden rocks show no mercy to the wealth of richest argosies or lives of the busiest seamen, and “ciphering closet-men” save our workers from infinite fruitless toil. The busier the multitude, the quieter must be the solitude of the thinker, who directs them. The greater the building on which the laborers engage, the more nice and accurate must be the “laying down” and “taking off” and “figuring up” of the draughtsman. There is no ground for fear, but there will be found students enough to marshal into order all the facts we accumulate, to turn heat and light enough upon the conglomerate mass to free from the dross and “roll out the shining streams of pure metal. Generalization and speculation are the hobbies of all our scholars. Heap up the statistics on their tables, and they will make their generalizations practical; they will test, by them, their speculations, and be forced to reject all stubborn theories that will not conform to the lasy curves of truth.

They are invaluable for statesmen, who would not erect in the public works, monuments to their own ignorance. For lack of them, impregnable forts have been located in districts where miasmata have soon left no lives to guard them; batteries constructed where poisoned air was a sufficient defence; dock-yards chosen and furnished with all their costly appointments, only to be removed again, when dear experience have taught the lesson that a cheap record of a few years’ duration would have shown at the first glance, public works abandoned when half completed, and myriads of lives sacrificed to pestilence, which had been drafted by war to woo back gentle peace.

All that is good in life-insurance, convenient in annuities, and beneficent in the multitudinous organizations, whose operations

are based on the probabilities of life, must be credited to vital statistics. Centuries ago there existed institutions under the name of guilds, mysteries, brotherhoods and fraternities, which had some of the intentions of modern life-insurance companies, but they operated without equity, and were necessarily confined within the narrowest limits. Nor could they possibly secure perfect justice to their members, until their rates of insurance were determined by carefully studying the bills of mortality. In this matter, perfect accuracy, or the nearest approximation to it possible, is the right of every insurer; for an error on one side endangers the value of his policy, or on the other, extorts from him a disproportionate premium. Most of the companies in England and America base their calculations on the Carlisle tables, and that they furnish the proper standard for England is altogether probable; although when the shares of the joint stock companies are paying the immense profits we read of, and some of the mutual companies are making their annual dividends of 50 per cent, in a country where investments seldom produce an average of more than three-and-a-half per cent per annum, the suspicion will intrude, that the probability of life may really be higher than the tables give it, and that these enormous dividends, are due in good part to rates of insuring held unjustly high. But if we assume that the Carlisle tables truly represent the mean duration of English life, must we, of course, admit them as the basis for our calculations? We do not differ much in latitude or in climate. Yet in many matters, that modify health and tend to fix the boundaries of life, we do essentially differ. England's wise men profess to have seen in us the seeds of decay. Her travellers have long ago noted our evidences of deterioration. Her honest philosophers have at times startled us with their assertions of our physical degeneracy. Dr. Price wrote to Dr. Franklin his conclusion, that but for the supply from the country, the population of Boston would decrease, although luxury was as yet but little diffused, and the remainder of New-England was, at the same time, enjoying a marvellous rapidity of increase. It would not be very strange if the intervention of an ocean, and two centuries of history by no means coincident, should so change us, that the average years of our lives should not agree. Why

“Lands intersected by a narrow firth
Abhor each other,”

while an ocean in space, and a continent in manners divide us. It is not 3,000 miles from England to Prussia, and both England and Prussia are old, subject to none of our variations, neither of them the possessors of a forest home to be opened before it can be peopled, and neither of them called to receive and dispose of an immigration sufficient to establish a new nation with every year; and yet the estimates which hold the annual average deaths in England at one for every sixty people, place them at one for every thirty-three in Prussia! Have we inherited, with the Saxon blood, his ratio of mortality? Is it not like cutting Jonathan's coat by his uncle's measure? Are we exercising our habitual prudence? The most perfect chart of the Aegean sea would be of small service to a pilot charged to take a ship through Hurl Gate; and the more accurately a life-table is adapted to the latitude and longitude of Carlisle, the more evident would seem its unfitness for St. Louis or Charleston. An error here inflicts injury not on heavy capitalists alone, but every one of the great mass of life-insurers; and there is not a widow who exchanges her right to the legal thirds of her deceased husband's estate for an annuity, but suffers in consequence. If the surmises of some who claim to know, are well founded, the aggregate differences between the actual worth of our life-policies and the premiums we pay for them, would annually pay the expenses of a perfect registry system. We are happy to believe, however, that we are not much misled by the Carlisle tables. The late census gives the expectation of life for the whites of Maryland, a little higher than the Carlisle tables until the age of eighty-eight, and a little lower than the British annuitants until the age of seventy-eight; and very probably this will be found to be nearly true throughout the States.

Grant that it may. And if we were a weak, puny and dependent colony it might be very proper for us to adopt England's figuring, hope for its fitness for us, and beg her to amend it through her excellent system, as often as her convenience or social changes required. But we imagine ourselves abundantly able to furnish our own code of laws, to clothe, to feed, and to protect ourselves. Shall we humbly seek foreign aid to calculate the interest we shall ask and receive for our money? Shall we

be satisfied with their rules, and content ourselves when we are told that they will *probably answer* for us? Let us rather supply for ourselves what others cannot supply for us. Let us use the material so profusely provided, which none can use for us, and from our own statistics and our own tables let us establish rates and rules which we know to be right; that none of our people may suffer for our negligence, that we may disprove the mis-statements of honest men abroad, and refute intelligently the calumnies of foreign detractors.

With proper collections of vital statistics we are more thoroughly equipped for scientific explorations in many other quarters. They are essential to the perfectness of a geographical description of a country; they are the permanent documents of a land, most grateful to the minute historian. Were there extant registers faithfully kept through the mediæval centuries, what a blaze of light would they throw upon those dark ages! If they had been kept through the reigns of Alfred, and Edgar, and Edward the Martyr, what a history would replace the myths and fables of Britain's morning! How much has been done for our own early history by the scanty records of towns whose settlement dates back two hundred years! The "Lists of the names of Old and Young, Christians and Heathens, ffremen and Servants, white and black, &c., inhabitteinge within sundrie townshippes" of Long Island, are among the most useful portions of the Documentary History of New-York, now in course of publication by the State. Strange that we should so properly appreciate those scraps of old registries, and yet pronounce worthless compilations of the same sort, far more full and available for far more purposes. One would suppose, that even if we could see no present use for them, we might perceive that remote posterity would cherish them as we do those rare old documents of a past century. The man who, from among our descendants, shall attempt such a history of our social life, as our greatest American statesman, on a late notable occasion, described as *the desideratum* in literature, would find in the registries, for which we plead ample facilities for a task that it is impossible for us to perform, in behalf of our predecessors.

They will guarantee their inalienable rights, to unfortunate freemen whose birthright of freedom may need to be established by

authentic registries, in spite of the presumptive evidence of color, unscrupulous malice or doubting yet grasping avarice, to the contrary.

They will be invaluable for jurists in regulating the descent of property. Not a few are poor, who should have been rich, but that they were not able as such registries would have made them, to trace their lineage flowing in distinct and unbroken lines from wealthy ancestors, whose hoarded wealth must be scattered among strangers or forfeited to the government. And this infelicity is growing with our means for getting gain and the opportunities for greater accumulation. Even the despised and imperfect registries of New-York for 1850 and 1851, which were scarcely deemed equivalent in value to the blank papers prepared for their reception, may, yet, decide questions of the largest consequence, determine the settlement of millions of money, and prove the most capable friends of justice whose kind designs, ignorance so often thwarts.

Again, the world sees in America a conglomeration of nations such as never was paralleled, and can only be illustrated adequately by its great antipodal event, the dispersion at Babel. Here are furnished the data for solving those puzzling problems concerning international crosses and marriages, added elemental infusions, and pretty general confusions of the most extensive sort. We here may learn what compound results, when Celts and Saxons, Schaves and Angles are fused together; how modified is the Yankee when crossed with Californian natives and Chinese coolies; how little or how like a saint is the son, whose fathers were Saints Patrick and Andrew, George and Jonathan. The world cannot choose but be the wiser for the issue of this colossal experiment. The issue will form one of the leading facts of the century. There is no danger that it will ever be lost. But the thousand little calculations, incidentally answering questions, over which science has been puzzling ever since he was old enough to apply himself to such recondite studies, the figurings in the corner of the slate, which are rubbed out so soon as the "answer" is obtained; these lesser though important items, can only be saved by vital registries that daguerreotype families in their course, through many years. Such would enable the hygie-

nist hereafter to speak positively and with authority on matters of much importance to the race, of which now they can only throw out conditional hints based on shrewd suspicions or ingenious though scarcely warrantable surmises. Had such registries been kept an hundred years, in sundry places, how much might we know that now looms up indistinctly through fogs into clouds! How much of man's natural history of the profoundest interest to humanity! How much of the laws of old-time epidemics, whose sacred foot-prints are yet visible, but which have contributed so meagrely to our stock of medical information! How much of the habits of climates, the wants of localities, the cycles of diseases and the cometic appointments of endemics that seem in our ignorance of their governing law to be without a law. For their lack, what a waste has there been of the raw material for precious knowledge! what a squandering of dear experience! Such statistics are items in the day book. After a while some one who is not busy with the orders and invoices, the buying and selling, will post them up. Then they will early give us data sufficient to settle the question of the relative mortality of the sexes. They will enable the sanitary philosopher to learn "the law that governs the waste of human life," a law that has been in operation for five thousand years, yet has never found an interpreter: perhaps arm him to drag to light the hidden causes of the mortality of our cities, and to some extent, to stay the fearful progress of our epidemics. The registry will give him a map of the fatal diseases of the State, and on the same sheet a map of the employment, age and habits of the deceased; while the meteorological record gives him a map of the atmospheric phenomena of the season; and by applying the one to the other, he can demonstrate the healthfulness of required profession in any one spot, as compared with the same occupation in any other place. The causes which make the prosecution of any branch of business, at one point, detrimental to health can be removed, and thus great gain accrue to property and life, by predicting with certainty the result of a contemplated enterprise.

These are not fancies but sober facts, as a reference to the experience of any city where such records have been kept, will show,

In Geneva, records of mortality have been kept for more than 260 years, and they show that a child born there now, has five times greater expectation of life than one born in 1590. The probable duration of life there at the close of the seventh century was less than 20 years; a century later it was 32 years; and in 1833, it had reached 45 years. It is not pretended that this great improvement is due solely to the registration there practiced, but that it has done much, we are not at liberty to doubt. Instances might be quoted, showing how places enjoying a reputation for salubrity, have been startled on referring to their newly established registries, at a surprising mortality in their midst. The tables annually published, sometimes exhibit striking diversities in the mortality of different parts of the same city, which arrest the attention of the medical philosopher. His deductions and conclusions are kept before the people till they enter into general calculation and modify popular practice. Local partialities are removed which had blinded them to their peril. Nuisances are abated, and deleterious practices omitted. Employments injurious to health are abandoned, or so followed as to lessen their danger. Thus life is lengthened, comparative immunity from disease is secured, and human happiness is increased. We do not look for such results in one year or four; they are the offspring of time and study. The State of New-York, with an enlightened forethought, and liberality worthy of the high commendation accorded her, has expended thousands of dollars on a geological survey. The facts accumulated by that survey are, for a time, of limited use; yet no thinking man doubts that hereafter they will become practically useful to the people. Geological details, which seem to possess no possible interest except for the scientific man who has made geology his study, when subjected to the chemistry of thought, will surrender some unsuspected law of nature. And that law becoming incorporated with the maxims of the agriculturist, will modify and improve his practice, and his farm will yield the more abundantly. So these statistics, sneered at now as valueless, will afford a rule of regimen, of diet, or of physical habit, that shall give us an increase of days and render them more free from the ills to which flesh is heir.

Says a late newspaper, "a few years ago, some single scales of a new species of fossil fish fell into the hand of Professor Agassiz. No individual of the species had ever been seen. From those scales the professor proceeded to draw out in full the form of the fish from the scales, as he thought it would be, should the fish itself ever be discovered. Two years after the whole fish was actually found, and on comparison, the drawing was seen to be an accurate representation of the fish."

The scales of scores of ichthyosauri and megalosauri in physics, and even in morals, are discovered among these rocky statistical deposits, and there are Agassiz in other sciences than fossilogy, to restore the whole from its fraction, to furnish the complete and shapely animal from its minutest relic.

But what will such a registry cost? for if it were forty fold worthier than we have made it, Yankees would refuse to commit themselves in its favor until they know what it cost. The Secretary of the State of Massachusetts stated in 1847, that *their* system cost for the preceding year less than \$4,000, which sum would have been somewhat increased had the returns been complete. Probably a thorough registration of our State might be effected at a cost no greater, in proportion to the numbers of our inhabitants than this, a sum, over which the Empire State surely would not long hesitate to exchange it for its immense advantages.

But, we have already a dead law among our statutes, intended to provide the very statistics we plead for. How to revive it, how to give it energy, how to enforce its provisions, or if the cause of failure lies in the law itself, by what amendments it can be made available? these are practical queries devolving entirely upon the friends of registration. That the law is defective, we grant, but external causes, more than any inherent defect, have rendered its requirements nugatory. The proverbial instability of legislation has been its worst foe. Before it had been long enough numbered among the laws of the land for those who were to do duty under it to become familiar with its mode of operation, an attempt was made to repeal it, and with every succeeding session of the Legislature the attempt is repeated. The people conclude that it is a law which slipped through while their

representatives slept, that it has no friends, and fails to be repealed only from a lack of energy on the part of its enemies. Repeatedly the impression has gone out that it has been repealed, and having no special "friend at court," clerks, laboring under that impression, fail to make their reports, and their failure, in turn, is used at the succeeding session as an argument for the law's inefficiency. We judge differently, however. The fact that all efforts to repeal it have failed, is a token that there is a feeling in favor of some system, however defective this one may be. The people have made no objection to it. Some have thought it useless, but a little reflection, the reading of a timely word, sets them right on that point. The supervisors of a single county object to it on the ground of its expense, and they have been more than balanced by sundry petitions from other quarters for such amendments as would make it effective.

It was unfortunate that the duty of collecting these statistics was imposed upon the officers of school districts, and that thus, it came to be thought a part of that school system, which was, for a while, so obnoxious to a portion of the people.

And another unpleasant feature was, that while it professed to pay clerks for their trouble, it scarcely paid them for the stationery it cost them. Clerks were required to present their bills for payment to the boards of town auditors who were to make only such allowance as their board of supervisors should first determine. Thus the first year, clerks, who in good faith, and for the sake of science, were willing to spend their time and labor in collecting all the required facts, were under the necessity of carrying or sending their claim of a dollar for services, to the county seat to be scrutinized, shaved down, and handed over to a board of auditors who were to pay it, if allowed, above full eighteen months after the services were rendered. To collect the statistics, was a far less serious undertaking than to collect the fee. Men who would willingly have performed double the labor for nothing, could not be hired to subject themselves twice to such mortifications. So the prestige of success was lost, and an evil odor allowed to endanger its popularity at the very outset.

The number of those who appreciate the sanitary and physiological importance of vital statistics, is rapidly increasing, as

well as of those who recognize their necessity for amending the rates of annuities and life insurance. If the present law is repealed, the doors of our Legislature will very soon be beset with petitions for the enactment of another. And we are assured, so grows this subject in the popular thought, that the concluding remark, "and your petitioners will ever pray," will not be an unmeaning collocation of words. But repealing and re-enacting add to the feeling of instability, and convey the suspicion of a law's mortality. Far better we think, and easier it would be to modify the present than to obtain a new act.

Perhaps it would suffice as it is, only adding a penalty for a failure to perform its requirements, and offering an equivalent for all services rendered. Independent men of New-York are a little chary of services rendered gratis to soulless bodies. They are believers in the doctrine, that their time is, or ought to be money, as well where given to a wealthy state, as to a poor neighbor. An increase of the fees of district clerks (who by the way, in their capacity of school officers have whole weeks of work to do for no compensation whatever) for recording the items, and a few shillings to town clerks for abstracting and forwarding them, would satisfy those officers that the State was not extorting a thankless task, and it would not very much add to its cost.

Perhaps a better plan would be to relieve it of all unpopularity that may attach in any quarter to the school system. Elect in each town and city an officer, who should be a medical man, as undoubtedly as the town attorney should be a lawyer, to collect all the statistics according to the best of his ability, through his correspondents, his assistants, or by personal visitation. Let him file his papers with the town clerk, and forward an abstract either directly or through the county clerk to the Secretary of State. Let him be paid by the town or city for his services, and obliged to pay a handsome penalty for neglect of duty.

Far better than any of these, is the system by which, since the year 1838, every birth, death and marriage in England and Wales, has been inventoried, with the names of the parties and the details and circumstances of each case regularly chronicled. At the head of the system, is a registrar general with a staff of clerks; subject to his control, there are scattered over the land,

more than six hundred superintendent-registrars, each in his fixed districts, who at regular periods corresponds directly with the registrar general at London. Under each of these, are several sub registrars whose fees are proportioned to their service, their duties light yet definite, and their forfeiture for neglect, certain. All of the reports are brought in to the general office, arranged, bound and indexed in such order that it is but the labor of a moment to refer to the name and record of any family in the kingdom.

It is not, however, the province of this paper, to urge upon the consideration of this society the employment of any specific plan. The subject is one of great importance, and it seems to us to be well worth the attention of the members of this society. If they deem it of sufficient consequence to warrant a little exertion, with them resides the power and the responsibility of the adoption of some feasible law.

Let this society entertain the topic as it often has done before. Let it give the subject in charge of a committee, whose duty it shall be to draft amendments to the present law, or a new bill as is most likely to prove effective, to seek out its friends in the next Legislature, and to convey to them their sense of its importance. Let individual members see that petitions, such as the committee may suggest or as each one prefers, shall go up to Albany, early in the next session with the signatures of men who, having had their attention called to the subject, approve the prayer; let them ask an early report from the committee to which they may be referred, and with a moderate degree of perseverance, without a doubt, the real wish of the State society would be gratified.

The returns for the first few years will be imperfect as a matter of course, but when the people are satisfied that the law will be allowed to remain a fixture among our institutions, the returns will come in full and promptly, and it will not be long before we shall be possessed of a body of reliable statistics which will prove of untold service to the whole country, and reflect new glory on the name and character of the Empire State.

